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ABSTRACT

An annual foreign language festival established by McNeese State University and the Calcasieu Parish School System (Louisiana) was designed to motivate students, inform them of employment opportunities, help them understand their own and other heritages, and illustrate the international and intercultural opportunities and challenges of the modern world. International Cultural Experience Day (ICE) is held in conjunction with a regional annual international week offering recreational, educational, promotional, industrial, cultural, and culinary activities. A spirit of camaraderie and solidarity has developed among the college and school language teachers involved. Planning has been incorporated into the recently-formed foreign language teachers' association. The event brings together students and teachers from different educational levels and groups from the community. Young and older guest speakers address the ICE Day audience on the university campus, focusing on language-related issues. Entertainment consists of game demonstrations, group singing, a scavenger hunt organized by language, international exhibits, and international food offered at the cafeteria. The event has become important in promoting foreign language and culture study. (MSE)

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INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL EXPERIENCE DAY: A Festival for Foreign Language Students

Gene Marshall, and Others

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International Cultural Experience Day:

A Festival for Foreign Language Students

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Language teachers throughout Southwest Louisiana face similar professional problems: to motivate students to study foreign languages and to convince them of practical and idealistic advantages of a second language skill; to inform them of employment opportunities; to help them understand their own heritage as well as foreign cultures; to afford them the opportunities and challenges of cross-cultural communication and the awareness of global interdependencies in today's world. Three years ago McNeese State University and the Calcasieu Parish School System instituted an annual foreign language festival designed to help break down some of these barriers. This paper describes the festival and makes practical suggestions for instituting a similar event in other communities.

The International Cultural Experience Day, I.C.E., is celebrated in conjunction with an Annual International Week for Lake Charles and Southwest Louisiana. The fall festival offers activities which are recreational, educational, business promotional, industrial, and cultural, as well as culinary. All events are designed to increase awareness and understanding of people and cultures from around the world. A number of circumstances have quite naturally contributed to its establishment: Lake Charles is an international port with a Foreign Trade Zone; it has industrial establishments which are international in scope and employ many foreign-born nationals; it possesses a number of unique natural and cultural features attracting tourism from abroad. The economy of the area quite clearly depends upon international trade. Therefore it was in the interest of the community to create a festival which would draw attention to global interrelationships and interests. One of the festival's most successful events so far has been the International Cultural Experience Day (I.C.E. Day), an educational activity whcih is the subject of this paper.

Because the position of Foreign Language Coordinator was eliminated due to budget cuts, university teachers worked directly with area foreign language teachers in planning I.C.E. 1983. Before I.C.E. was held, five meetings between university and non-university teachers were held to plan the day's activities. Through these meetings and other joint activities, a strong sense of cooperation has evolved among everyone involved. The university faculty is eager to promote the campus, its foreign language course offerings, and its language laboratory facilities. The non-university teachers are extremely supportive of I.C.E. since they view it as a learning device for their students and as a reward for those students who have worked especially hard to learn a second or third language. I.C.E. also serves as an incentive for all students to continue foreign language study. It offers them an opportunity to receive support and encouragement from fellow students from other schools who are also engaged in foreign language study. Community leaders who have benefitted from foreign language study and who actively use a foreign language in their business come to talk with the high school students to encourage and stimulate them.

Among the most important benefits of working directly with the teachers is the spirit of cameraderie that has developed among the foreign language teachers involved. I.C.E. has emphasized our common purpose, that is, to teach and to promote foreign languages at every level.

This year I.C.E. planning was incorporated into the recently formed Foreign Language Educators Association (FLEA, to use its acronym), organized a few months ago as part of McNeese's participation in a National Endowment for the Humanities grant through the University of Pennsylvania. The purpose of the grant is to urge foreign language teachers at all levels to form a local professional organization, much like county medical associations or legal associations. The task in planning I.C.E. Day was therefore greatly facilitated this year since FLEA was already in place and operative.

At the organizational meeting decisions are made jointly on major content and strategic aspects of the I.C.E. Day. The amount of a nominal registration fee is agreed upon, method of preregistration determined and other general matters decided. Either the high school foreign language coordinator or the university I.C.E. coordinator sends out letters announcing the event and requesting the number of participating students by language and level of study be sent in before an established deadline. The person sending the letters also collects the reservations and preregistration fees. The money is deposited in a university credit union account, to be used later for festival expenses. Experience has shown that on-site registration is cumbersome and time-consuming, detracting from the day's real purpose and activities.

I.C.E. Day brings together students and teachers of foreign languages from the area and from different educational levels. It gives them the opportunity not only to celebrate a day of solidarity and fun, but also to have authentic international experiences otherwise available only through travel and study abroad.

There are additional benefits from I.C.E. Day: many university organizations work together in cooperation with administrators, language departments, foreign language clubs, foreign student organizations and the library. Foreign language teachers and students from all levels cooperate in a joint project. The International Week and I.C.E. bring together diverse groups of people from the community, all interested in promoting international awareness and strengthening foreign language study.

Most communities have similar internationally oriented citizens groups who can be contacted and asked to contribute to an international cultural day. You might check to see if your community has any of the following:

a) high school foreign language coordinator
b) area foreign language teachers' organization (incl. different languages and different educational levels)
c) a high school/university public relations officer
d) Rotary Club, AAOW, and other organizations with international divisions and chairmen
e) international clubs: France-Amerique, Latin-American club, German club
f) Veterans of Foreign Wars chapter with an international officer
g) international industry with community relations officer
h) tourist bureau and travel agencies
i) foreigners residing in the community who are willing to come to the campus for the international activities.

When the concept of the I.C.E. Day was proposed and accepted a little over two years ago, the members of the Foreign Languages Faculty at McNeese met with the Foreign Language Coordinator for Lake Charles and the surrounding area and with representatives from local high school foreign language teachers. The Foreign Language Coordinator (who coordinates foreign language programs among elementary, middle and high schools) played an important role in planning I.C.E. Day, especially in the early organizational stages. He contacted all teachers in the area, informed them of I.C.E. activities, and worked with them and with school board officials so that area foreign language students could participate. He functioned as the liaison between the university and non-university teachers.

Other tasks are assigned to participating teachers. The job of contacting speakers is shared. A university administrator is asked to welcome the campus guests. One high school teacher from each language represented receives the assignment of finding a song for a group sing-along. One or two people design a scavenger hunt with directions which are then translated into French, Spanish, German and Latin. The university I.C.E. coordinator requests that "exotic" foods be served in the cafeteria on the day of I.C.E. Two or three teachers obtain prizes. One individual mails out and receives registration information and fees. College instructors recruit and prepare their students as guides for the scavenger hunt. Community organizations such as France-Amerique, Latin-American Club, international branches of the AAUW, Rotarians and Enterprise Club are contacted and asked to participate. Musicians for entertainment and background music are contacted by other members. Above all, a versatile and enthusiastic moderator is found for the Speakers' Forum.

The I.C.E. coordinator reserves on campus the necessary rooms and equipment. If films are desired, a university professor of any given language orders films for that language.

On I.C.E. Day students, their teachers, parents and chaperones file into the auditorium, which has been reserved well in advance by the I.C.E. coordinator. The program moderator seats the speakers; the coordinator briefs the student guides; and those responsible for awards bring them. All that done, and barring a thunderstorm or act of war, I.C.E. Day is bound to become a memorable and exciting event for the 500 foreign language students attending the activities.

As the I.C.E. Day program begins, colorful posters decorate the auditorium and band music welcomes the incoming participants. A university dignitary—preferably one who is multi-lingual—greets the students on behalf of the university. He or she emphasizes the importance of foreign language study and how it can be useful to the students throughout their lives.

After the official welcome, several young speakers address the audience, each for about five minutes. The speakers might be foreign students, recent graduates in foreign languages, or even high school students who have lived abroad or been on a summer/year-abroad program. Young speakers can best impart to their peers the practical value of foreign language study, although some of our best speakers have been mature adults. A Swedish student, for example, talked about the fact that she was awarded her MSU tennis scholarship because she had previously studied English. Other student favorites include a demonstration of African native fashions, handicrafts, music and dances.

Finding the best speakers is a group effort, and brainstorming has been successful. The individual who knows a potential speaker contacts that person and is responsible for that person's presence at the meeting.

For entertainment we have tried game demonstrations and group singing. With large audiences, songs work best. A high school instructor of each of the four languages chooses a song and practices it with his or her classes, who present their song to the other students, encouraging audience participation whenever possible. Clever presentation, props, and hand-outs of lyrics lend more life to the sing-along. If at all possible, the organizers should try to have instrumental accompaniment.

After the students have listened to speakers and worked up their enthusiasm with music, they set off eagerly on the scavenger hunt. This activity is extremely important to the overall impact of the day. Its success or failure depends in large measure upon the amount of thought and imagination given to the planning and preparation of the hunt. The logistics must be clearly worked out ahead of time, the instructions and exercises varied and interesting, and the stations meaningful in terms of arousing cultural, historical, and intellectual curiosity in other countries.

Students are assigned to teams according to their foreign language. Each group must accomplish all the steps of the scavenger hunt set for them in a given period of time. The first team to complete all tasks and to return with completed materials wins and receives a prize.

During the scavenger hunt, students go to stations that have been set up by various internationally related groups. The job of securing the cooperation of each group is divided among university faculty members. Cooperating groups include the campus International Students Association; foreign language clubs; CODOFIL teachers from Belgium, France and Quebec; the Tourist Commission; Arts Council; France-Amerique; and Latin American Clubs; etc.

Among high school favorites are the different international exhibits; interviewing foreign students who wear their native dresses; and asking for samples of hand-writing at the Chinese, Arabic and Indian booths.

Stations are set up in places which might be of special interest to high school visitors; for example, in the library, the Dean's or President's office, Fine Arts, Music or Athletic Centers, the recreation facilities, student union, and school auditoriums.

The university I.C.E. coordinator obtains permission to use various buildings on campus where the exhibits can be displayed and activities located. It is important to mark these stations clearly in easily recognizable form through music, posters, etc. In addition to the displays, each station must also have several volunteers who can process the high school

participants, check their answer sheets, and distribute directions to the next check point display.

Each group of students has its route pre-planned to minimize overcrowding at any one station. The directions can be distributed at the beginning of the hunt all at once or one instruction at a time after a group has completed the task for that leg of the hunt. First-year groups follow more direct routes while advanced pupils are given more complex directions in their respective foreign language. In our case the directions were printed on off-set by the university print shop. Vocabulary lists should be sent out well in advance so participating high school teachers can prepare students for the hunt.

Each team of high school students receives a university guide, usually a volunteer foreign language student. To identify and differentiate between the teams it is important to give them names and posters for easy identification. This can be done according to cities, authors, or any well-known name relating to the languages and cultures which the students are studying. Large signs depicting Heidelberg, Versailles, Notre Dame, Valencia, or Acapulco can be made by student artists on a competitive basis.

The winning team is recognized during the closing ceremonies and receives a prize which is primarily of symbolic value such as books, cassettes, dictionaries, or theater tickets. These are contributed by individuals or campus or community groups. The local mascot, Gumbo Gator (a man in a bright green alligator costume) has been the popular presenter of the prizes. He is hired by the I.C.E. committee and paid with funds generated by the participation fee.

After the hunt, adolescent appetites can be satisfied on a Dutch treat basis at the university cafeteria which offers a special international menu on that day. Advance consultation with the food service management assures sufficient quantities of the exotic cuisine. For students who do not want to eat, foreign films can be provided and shown during the lunch period. College language teachers arrange for the films and the coordinator reserves the projection rooms.

The I.C.E. Day has become an important tool for promoting the study of foreign languages and cultures. For the rest of the school year, I.C.E. Day represents a point of heightened appreciation of cultural diversity and an important stimulus to foreign language learning in our area.

I.C.E. Day fulfills the general goals of the International Fall Festival in many ways. By drawing upon volunteers and professionals from many different interest groups to join in I.C.E. activities, this common project greatly strengthens awareness of the area's global interdependency. By

increasing the knowledge and understanding of other cultures, it prepares the community for the future, preserves its cultural heritage, and promotes international business opportunities.